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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000241

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FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ETRD](#) [KIRF](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI JEWISH LEADERS PUSHING REPEAL OF
JACKSON-VANIK AMENDMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Several local Azerbaijani Jewish activists are seeking to lobby the U.S. Government to annul the Jackson-Vanik amendment of the 1974 Trade Act of the United States. There appears to be some level of coordination between the Jewish activists and the GOAJ in this effort, which tracks with the generally close relations between local Jewish leaders and GOAJ officials. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Dr. Larisa Efimovna Reikhrudel, President of the Humanitarian Association of Jewish Women of Azerbaijan Republic, recently sent a letter to the Embassy, asking for the Embassy's assistance in forwarding a letter to the President and members of Congress. Reikhrudel's letter affirms the importance of the U.S.-Azerbaijan bilateral relationship, then calls for the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment and section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. (Letter faxed to EUR/CARC.)

¶3. (C) The Embassy reached out to several local Jewish leaders to gain additional context on Reikhrudel's letter. Gennadiy Zelmanovich, the head of Azerbaijan's Ashkenazi Jewish community, told us the local Jewish community is seeking to lobby the U.S. to annul the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Zelmanovich and other commentators we spoke with urged that the conditions behind the amendment -- namely the Soviet Union's attempt to slow Jewish emigration -- no longer exist, and that the Government of Azerbaijan does not impede Jews from emigrating. Zelmanovich and a separate Jewish contact suggested this effort by the Jewish community is done with the blessing or support of the GOAJ.

¶4. (C) The degree to which this is a coherent letter-writing campaign is unclear. When asked, Semyon Ihilov, the leader of Azerbaijan's largest Jewish community (the Mountain Jews), was in the dark about the Jackson-Vanik amendment. When we provided background on the amendment, Ihilov said the GOAJ imposed no barriers on Jews seeking to emigrate from Azerbaijan. He did not appear to be involved in any concerted Azerbaijani Jewish effort to lobby the U.S. to annul the amendment.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Embassy believes select members of the Jewish community are behind this effort, and they probably have coordinated this effort with the GOAJ at some level. It is unlikely, however, that this is a well-organized campaign. The most likely explanation is that some Jewish community leaders or a GOAJ official suggested that local Azerbaijani Jewish leaders should undertake this effort.

16. (C) Comment (continued): The GOAJ maintains close and positive relations with Azerbaijan's Jewish leaders both as part of its long history of religious tolerance a conscious policy decision to ensure that Azerbaijan,s Jewish minority enjoys full religious freedom and, in part, as a tool for gaining influence with the U.S. and Israel. The GOAJ hopes to develop closer links with American Jewish groups to advance a positive image of Azerbaijan in the U.S. and to combat the strength of the Armenian lobby. This letter writing effort may be one piece of evidence suggesting the GOAJ increasingly is sensitized to the need to create and strengthen lobbying groups that can push its perspective in Washington, and is increasingly active in doing so.
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